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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, the road to good jobs for young persons in West Germany has been the "dual system" of vocational education and training (VET), similar to apprenticeships in the United States, but practiced on a much wider scale. A large percentage of West German youth usually enter such programs after high school in order to prepare for skilled trades--indeed, for most jobs except casual labor. In recent years, however, the world-wide problem of unemployment has been making entry into the apprenticeship system much more difficult. Today, only about half of West German youth can go directly into the VET system after high school. A small number go on to universities for higher education, and some go into casual labor, but for about 20 percent of the youths, there is no easy road to good jobs. Many of these young people participate in a year of vocational training sponsored by the state as a stopgap measure, then reapply for an apprenticeship the following year. In this way, many of the youths do eventually get into the VET system, but the majority of them do not train for the jobs in which they are most interested, or even for their second choices. Although the problems in the system are a result of structural unemployment, youths tend to blame themselves for their problems in finding a place in the system; most then work harder to try again the next year. Those who fail still blame themselves rather than society. The government, schools, and private enterprise in West Germany need to work to expand the employment sector and the opportunities for young people to get into the "dual system" in order to ensure a better future for these youths and for the country. (KC)

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COPING WITH THREATENING UNEMPLOYMENT

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1. "Any Vocational training is better than none"

The unique characteristic of the transition from school to work in West Germany is that the education system is not directly linked to the employment system, they are connected by the "dual system" of vocational education and training (VET).

Continuity and success of the "dual system" have brought about the common belief that the existing institution of VET can adapt and respond to changes in qualifications needed because of new technology. The VET system has an undisputed tradition and is a fundamental reference point for the life plans of young West Germans. More than two thirds of the total German labor force is occupationally qualified by having completed VET. Once enrolled in an apprenticeship less than 5 % drop out and over 90 % pass the final examinations.

Without an apprenticeship in the "dual system" there is little chance of getting an employment and the danger to be assigned to the casual segment of the labor market. The "dual system", however, is not an equal opportunity system, it favors young men. Young women are still a minority among the apprentices and are trained in a restricted range of occupations: 40 % of all contracts are in only four occupations: salesperson, hairdresser, food sales person and office clerk.

At present the VET system offers technical and theoretical training in 429 recognized training occupations. In addition to conveying occupational competence VET is to bring about good work habits, a concern for quality work, flexibility in view of changing technology, cooperative attitudes, a readiness to accept responsibility and a conformity with the organization rules of the firm.

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In the "dual system" young people get on-the-job and off-the-job training in companies, and this is complemented by compulsory day - release to a vocational school run by the state. The apprentices get allowances which are negotiated by the unions and the employers and vary from industry to industry, the average in 1980 was DM 500,-- ($ 200,-) per month.

Seeing VET as crucial for a qualified labor force and the stability of the social division of labor, employers and unions compete in obtaining influence over the young generation at the critical stage when it moves from school to work. The unions want more public control and financing of the "dual system". They see themselves a guardians for the realization of equal opportunity for young people in the VET and employment systems. They want not just the training of a competent and flexible labor force but of self-confident citizens who demand and are active in social and economic participation in firms and political life. The employers, however, resist more control by the state; for example they are against a proposal to create more places for apprentices in view of increasing youth unemployment by introducing a levy-grant system, comprising those firms which offer too few or no apprenticeships at all.

Passing the "dual system" traditionally means to acquire the ticket for admission to the employment system. Since the mid 1970ies, however, the supply has not matched the demand for apprenticeships. Rationalization and automation at the workplace have had not only the effect of a reduction of the labor force needed, but also of an increase in the skill requirements for those applying for employment. Despite the diminishing of chances to get an apprenticeship, the acquisition of key competences is more important than ever. It is generally believed and accepted by most

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young people and their parents that these transferable competences and the socialization outcomes of VET have a use-value of their own, thus improving the employment prospects.

Today, in a period of labor market crisis, to be a certified craftsman is regarded to be an asset in the competition for scarce jobs. This has led to a training for stock which may have its logic according to the assumption that economic growth depends on high standards of occupational competence among the labor force. According to the subjective logic, however, which gives meaning to life-perspectives and occupational self-concepts, this training for stock may have depressing effects: the warehousing function (cf. Walters 1984) is a bad substitute for the employment function of VET expected by the young people.

Guided by the belief that "any vocational training is better that none", school leavers from Secondary Stage I ("Hauptschule") are ready to enter even apprenticeships which lead into dead-end occupations. The labor market squeeze already has the consequence that the intermediate educational level ("Realschule") is becoming mandatory to enter a promising apprenticeship. The restricted opportunities for learning a trade have led to a situation where apprentices with a higher ranking education are preferred by employers for good jobs and promotion over those who have the same vocational training, but lower ranking educational credentials (cf. Kaiser, Nuthmann, Stegmann 1985). For those youth who do not manage to get into the "dual system" a variety of compensatory schemes of pre-vocational or vocational schooling are offered in order to qualify them and to keep them off the streets.

2. Youth unemployment and compensatory programs of vocational education

In the 1970s, certain school measures were developed to improve opportunities for children from the lower income groups (curriculum reform and comprehensive schools), but since the beginning of the 1980ies, in response to the crisis on the labor market, we have had a series of state measures (preparatory training and vocational school courses), designed to compensate for the shortage of company apprenticeships (cf. Heinz 1985a).

2.1 The extent of youth unemployment

Fewer and fewer school-leavers from Secondary Stage I are able to go directly into the vocational training they want. Depending on the region, only between one third and one half of these school-leavers succeed in getting a training place in the "dual system". But very few even of these are able to start training for the job they really want, and to supplement the familiar VET the last few years have seen a growing number of measures to prepare young people for the world of work. These have included special courses in training centres and schools, training place promotion programmes by the Federal and Länder Governments and special promotion measures by the Federal Employment Institute (run by the regional employment offices). The range is now bewildering.

At the end of 1984 163.000 persons under the age of 20 were registered unemployed in the Federal Republic of Germany. But this figure does not reflect accurately the number of young people, particularly girls and the children of foreign workers, who face severe problems when they try to enter the world of work. The German Trade Union Federation (DGB) estimated there were about 255.000 who are not in a training place

where they will get either a full or part-qualification - 18 % of those wanting to enter an apprenticeship. This number has increased to 326.000 in 1985 - 21,5 % of the youth entitled to enter VET. The proportion of rejected youth would be much higher without the compensatory schemes. The state-funded transition programs in vocational schools, and the special programs outside companies which provide part-qualifications, had absorbed more of the school-leavers and youngsters without a school-leaving certificate who would otherwise have registered as unemployed. Moreover, the share of young people, particularly girls, who have given up registering with the employment offices after repeated failures to get placed is also rising.

Thus, social inequalities today are not only frighteningly apparent in the transition from secondary schooling to higher education, they are even more apparent in the transition from school to vocational training. At the end of 1983 a survey (cf. Rolff et al, 1984) of parents showed that 44 per cent of the parents wanted their children to train in the "dual system"; the figure was 59 per cent for working class parents. But nearly two-thirds of the parents questioned said they were afraid their child would not be able to find an appropriate training place after leaving school. This shows that there is widespread uncertainty about the future for young people.

2.2 Vocational training: how large is the demand?

The figures for young people who are unemployed or without a training place are rising dramatically from year to year, yet at the beginning of every training year there is a controversy on the actual extent of the demand for apprenticeships on the part of young people. The Federal Government (Federal Ministry of Education and Science, BMBW, 1984)

assumes that for 1984 demand was only for about 760.000 places. But this figure does not include those young people who left school in earlier years and who are applying for training places again, nor does it include those young people who are leaving vocational schools and are also potential applicants for places in the "dual system". According to estimates by the DGB there are about 300.000 of the former and about 320.000 of the latter.

In their minority vote on the Federal Government's annual Vocational Education Report the trade union representatives on the Main Committee of the Federal Vocational Education Institute assumed that the training place target for 1985 should have been about 1.770.000.

According to this:

1. 784.000 (44,4 %) will be able to commence training for a full qualification in the "dual system";
2. 310.000 (17,5 %) will find a place in a one-year part-qualification course with a basic vocational training year in a school;
3. 89.000 (5 %) will join a preparatory program and do training in a school or in one of the Federal Employment Institute's schemes for one year;
4. 260.000 (14,7 %) will go to university or some other form of higher education; and
5. 326.000 (18,5 %) will get no training.

Thus, for 1985 we can record the highest rate ever of young people who could not get a start into VET.

The government transition or bridging measures and the opportunities now being offered to acquire part-qualifications in courses in

vocational schools, which a quarter of the school-leavers make use of, are mopping up youngsters who would otherwise register as unemployed, so that they do not appear in the statistics. But these young people do not abandon their aim of getting a training place in a company; they will have to be counted among the applicants in 1986.

As a result, from year to year we have a growing core of young people who are hard to place, whose prospects on the labor market are bad, who are at a high risk of under-employment, or who drift between unemployment and occasional jobs.

2.3 Bridging measures - part-qualifications and preparatory schemes

The trend shows that secondary school-leavers face a worsening outlook when they want to start in working life, and joining a preparatory scheme is increasingly becoming the only alternative to unemployment. As we showed in our study of young people's experiences on the labor market in Bremen (Heinz, Krüger et al, 1985) the expansion of the preparatory schemes reflects the growing difficulties in getting on to training places.

The one-year full-time vocational school courses are increasingly coming to act as "waiting rooms" for young people, especially for girls, who have not been able to find a training place in the "dual system".

The basic vocational training year has also been built up and it is increasingly functioning as a refuge for young people who cannot find a training contract. Its main aim is to give school-leavers a better chance of getting a training place by providing them with a basic qualification. But it means that when they finish the basic year these youngsters have to compete all over again with school-leavers from Secondary Stage I and leavers from one-year vocational school courses.

The one-year preparatory schemes are intended for school-leavers who did not pass the final examination and have no certificate. But they often also absorb young people who failed to get an apprenticeship because their certificate was not good enough, and sometimes even pupils from secondary modern schools join these schemes.

In view of the criteria for entry to these schemes, the participants are often regarded as one of the problem groups on the labor market.

This may be justified in one respect: the young people are facing the proplem that they have left general schooling without any real prospects of a job. But to call them a problem group illustrates a trend in the discussion on manpower policy which is to concentrate not so much on their difficulties in finding an apprenticeship as their lack of qualifications.

The low marks achieved in school are taken to be the cause of the difficulties in finding a job. So young people who did not manage to get a certificate, who have certain difficulties in learning or were not in a position to go into vocational training immediately on leaving school are being called backward or problem groups. This principle of saying there is something wrong with the young people who have difficulty in finding a job is giving rise to educational concepts which are aiming in the wrong direction as far as most of the young people are concerned.

When demand exceeds the supply of apprenticeships, companies which offer training prefer the best pupils. This, however, does not justify the verdict that those young people who fail to get a place in fierce competition, are incapable of being trained or do not want to be trained. On the contrary, the compensatory measures, which generally take the form of prolonging schooling, have been dictated by the crisis on the labor market. They are designed to syphon off the excess demand for

training places and jobs. It ist less and less the personal characteristics of the young people that decide whether they get a place or not and increasingly the unequal formal principles of the various measures and the specific recruitment strategies of companies.

That a group of young people can be declared a problem group, quite independent of any capabilities relevant to training, is evident from the fact that girls are said to be a problem group on the labor market, although they tend to have higher qualifications than boys on average.

This is a striking illustration of what, despite all the differences between a "backward pupil" and a "problem girl" with a good school-leaving certificate, gives rise to the label "problem group".
The common factor ist simply failure on the labor market and in the market for training places.

2.4 Compensatory programs take young people out of the primary labor market

Those young people who do not go directly from school into the "dual system" have less chance of obtaining a job as qualified workers in the core workforce of a company. If they go into one of the compensatory measures they find themselves in a vicious circle and drift further and further away from their longterm goal of a full vocational training.

In most cases these more devious routes into working life mean that the young people have to overcome greater obstacles if they want a job as skilled workers. The young people who have successfully completed one of the bridging scheme courses again find themselves faced with the risk of being called a problem group on the labor market. The chances for this group of getting out of the secondary labor market (under-employment or seasonal employment) are slight. These young people - who after all

account for one quarter of the school-leavers in any one year - see the compensatory measure less as a meaningful route to qualification than as a way of filling in time. It is not a proper alternative to vocational training in their eyes.

Not only in our study is it apparent (Heinz, Krüger et al, 1985) that these young people are highly flexible in their wishes regarding occupation and training conditions. It is not surprising that flexibility in the form of willingness to make concessions over the job they want is most marked in those who have the worst prospects initially (Federal Vocational Education Report, 1984, p. 35).

This brings us to a more general link between the conditions in the labor market and young people's readiness not only to accept that they will not get the training they want but also to go into a school training scheme even though they are tired of school.

As a study in the USA (Walters 1984, p. 659) showed, the growing number of pupils staying on at school is more probably due to changes on the labor market:

> "Students may have left school when there were attractive opportunities for them in the labor market, and stayed in school longer when the job market was 'tight'. This dynamic may have little to do with the utility of schooling as a means of preparing students for adult occupational roles."

So there are indications that when the labor market is going through a crisis young people agree to stay in school longer. School then takes on the role of a "warehouse", it is a way of marking time. At the same time school acts as a socio-political instrument in reducing social and political conflict and this gains predominance over its real function of educating young people.

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3. Long term effects of failing to enter vocational training

After having described the changing structure of the transition from school to work in West Germany, we will now focus on the lasting consequences of not getting started for youth who leave school in the 1980ies. There is still a range of temporary arrangements with the threat of unemployment, from staying in school longer, or enrolling in compensatory programs, to taking up part-time jobs. One major long term consequence will be a stratified system of transitional prospects which reflects the segments of the labor market. The young people with a low ranking education (Hauptschule) will only get into training for dead-end occupations or they will have to circulate within compensatory training until being old enough to get hired as unskilled laborers.

Those with intermediate or high ranked education (Realschule und Gymnasium) will enter apprenticeships with good employment prospects and/or continue with an academic training.

A second long term consequence will be the creation of unstable training and employment patterns and discontinuous occupational biographies. Growing numbers of school-leavers and young adults are thus drawn into a "process of unemployment" (Büchtemann 1984), a negative career with a cumulation of employment risks. This "career" starts with getting vocational training with dim labor market chances or with picking up compensatory measures. This is followed by failing to find employment which enforces retraining or accepting dequalified work, underemployment, and finally unemployment.

A recent analysis of labor market careers of young people by Blossfeld (1984) has documented that the critical conditions determining the transition from school to work will have permanent effects on the

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occupational biographies of the school-leavers. Not having entered VET in West Germany means to carry a stigma which impairs job search and interferes with the construction of a recognized occupational identity. It is very difficult to recover from a failed transition because the lack of work experience, indadequate qualifications and unstable employment-histories are charged to the account of the youth's personality.

Thus, the young people have to carry the burden of a structural destabilization of their occupational prospects because they happen to belong to a generation which leaves school in a period of radical dislocations of the labor market.

It still is an open question how this labilization of getting started affects life plans and self-conceptions of the young people. Following socialization theory it can be assumed that their coping strategies are tied to social background, value orientations and life-goals on the one hand and their social networks and economic resources supporting the transition on the other. It seems quite possible that the failure to get into VET triggers an erosion of occupational orientations and career goals which give way to short term arrangements with the training and employment options available.

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4. The impact of labor market experiences on occupational orientations

A variety of contrasting assumptions exists about the main effects of the transition in crisis on consciousness and behavior of youth (cf. Baethge, Schomburg, Voskamp 1983). The theory of post-adolescence is one prominent approach to explain a presumed turning to personality development, independent life-styles and cultural creativity beyond the world of work among the young generation. This outlook is said to result from the discrepancy between psychosocial development and social and economic dependence. Youth has to cope with a discrepancy which marks "post-industrial society". Leaving aside the doubtful empirical evidence, this theory most likely applies to academic youth who disposes of ample opportunities to experiment with various life-styles compared with labor market bound school-leavers.

The latter are said to develop an attitude of indifference toward work - mere "job-consiousness" - and to turn to private life, combined with a latent readiness to rebel against the institutions of society.
This assumption is not convincing either in view of the widespread demands of West-German school-leavers to enter vocational training in order to qualify for employment.

Thus, it seems to correspond more with social and subjective reality to assume that work values and occupational orientations of school-leavers have not changed very much. As long as the social division of labor and the unequal structure of the systems of education and vocational training persist, work values mirror the social inequalities of society (cf. Braverman 1974, Bowles and Gintis 1976).

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Recent research on the direction and intensity of changes in the meaning young people connect with vocational training and work seems to confirm this theoretical perspective. Several representative studies comparing the work related attitudes of young West Germans belonging to the 1962, 1972, and 1983 age cohorts (Allerbeck and Hoag 1985, Fend and Prester 1985, Fuchs and Zinnecker 1985) have found that

- the expectation that work should support self-realization is being maintained,
- job security has attained utmost importance and income expectations have been reduced,
- possible unemployment or dequalification are anticipated,
- the belief in promotion by achievement has given way to a more critical attitude toward the conditions of work,
- the criteria of job search among boys and girls have become quite similar, girls have included qualified employment in their life plans, too.

We have to conclude that there is more continuity than discontinuity of life-goals and occupational attitudes over a span of 20 years (cf. Heinz 1985 b). So we can say that in view of the risks in the labor market at least secondary school-stage I-leavers ("Hauptschüler" und "Realschüler") are made to follow mainly the practical consideration of how to manage to get an apprenticeship.
Confronted with severely restricted options they are more likely to re-define their vocational interests without changing the criteria for a good job. They perform short-term arrangements with the labor market to reduce the danger of missing the bus (cf. Heinz 1985 c).

This coping strategy can not be explained by referring only to explit anticipatory socialization at home and at school. It is rather a consequence of the "hidden curriculum" of the labor market experiences which accompany the transition from school to work in a period of crisis. Thus, failing to enter VET will be especially disappointing for school-leavers from working class background whose achievements at school are mainly motivated by the expected entrance into the "dual system". Labor market pressure has led to an increased importance of school achievement for success in the employment system: getting good grades is regarded as a prerequisite for entering vocational eduction. The appreciation of qualified work is expressed by the young people's refusal to accept a job as an unskilled worker, they still seek an optimal starting point for working life by applying for apprenticeships: "A skilled worker without a job is still better off than an student without a job" - they use to say.

5. Managing transition in crisis: Results of the Bremen Study

In our study (Heinz, Krüger et al 1985) we have been led by the assumption that the effects of critical life sequences on consciousness and behavior of young people will only be explained adequately when the transition is regarded as a coping process to be reconstructed from the point of view of the young people themselves. This presupposes a research approach based on a theoretical conception of the relationships between living conditions, orientations and actions which conceives of the actor as a self-reflexive subject who develops behavior out of a meaningful appraisal of social contexts (cf. Giddens 1976). The methodology adequate to explore the subjective side of coping processes is interpretative social research (cf. Witzel 1982).

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We accompanied a group of 200 boys and girls ("Hauptschüler") from grade 7 until the first year after leaving school in the city-state of Bremen, which has the highest rate of youth unemployment (current official rate is 18 %, compared to 8 % in the Federal Republic), from 1979 to 1983. By applying the notion of "theoretical sampling" (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967) we selected students living in different socio-economic quarters of the city. We conducted four focussed ("problem-centered" Witzel 1982) interviews with each student during a period of four years at the end of each school year. The interviews were concentrated on experiences and activities in applying for an apprenticeship, perceptions of labor market prospects, the range of occupational interests, and the dimensions of work orientations.

Our interpretative, qualitative content analysis started from the transcripts of all interviews and attempted to elaborate changes in occupational interests, risk perception and coping strategies occurring from year to year. Of special interest was the exploration of reasons given for maintaining, modifying or changing orientations in relation to four turning points of the transition:

- assignment to the school level ("Hauptschule"),
- application for an apprenticeship,
- successful or fruitless results of application,
- results of loop-ways taken to prevent unemployment.

Finally, it was our aim to show the gradual adjustment of occupational interests to the supply side as well as the attempts to reconstruct coherence and continuity between options followed.

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5.1 Biographical consistency and personal responsibility

We found that young people want to accomplish a sense of biographical continuity despite disjointed stages of transition. Thereby they turn to cultural patterns of interpretation linking action outcomes to personal intentions and social circumstances. They give accounts for plans and actions which refer not so much to the economic necessity of earning a living but to a culturally defined standard of work being central for social identity and self-determination. To get trained in order to enter the lower ranks of the occupational hierarchy is an accepted perspective. This outlook not only corresponds with social class traditions but with a self-description as having mainly practical talents. Young people from working class background take it for granted to relate interests and skills to the range of occupations accessible in the manufacturing, crafts and service sectors of the labor market.

Despite this self-containment the young people interviewed insist to claim individual responsibility for succeeding in the labor market. They demand from themselves to try as hard as possible to cope with the imposed restrictions in order to achieve a good starting position for employment. They emphasize that a decision for an occupation has to be carried out independently. Being steered into an apprenticeship is regarded by them as a violation of the claim to achieve a self-directed selection out of a range of options. Though the majority of school-leavers enters only vocational training in second-choice occupations they construct a version of continuity between personal interests and results of their job search. This smoothing of a difficult transition process expresses the need for a consistent biography which permits a personal attachment necessary to carry through with the demands of vocational training.

The young people who were steered into compensatory schemes construct continuous biographies, too. They maintain that the qualifications offered in these programs are tied to specific vocational interests and will improve their chances to get an apprenticeship. The longer they have to stay in loop-ways, however, the more they refrain from specific interests in favor of arranging themselves with the next best chance to earn a living. Girls cope with this situation by falling back on the family orientation.

Thus, each result of the transition process is biographically elaborated according to a principle of comparative advantages: an apprenticeship taken up as an emergency measure is seen as better compared to a compensatory training scheme which in turn is regarded as favorable compared to unskilled part-time employment or unemployment.

5.2 Patterns of personalized interpretation

To provide meaning for the steps taken in coping with the transition in crisis young people resort to basic patterns of personalized interpretation. These interpretations contribute to a subjective tuning of social experiences and behavioral requirements and they support self-activation despite restricted opportunities in the labor market.
We have found three major patters of interpretations:

- Personalization of structural impacts.
- Biographical constructions of occupational interests.
- Perception of selection processes as opening up new prospects.

By personalizing structural impacts success and failure in getting an apprenticeship are linked to the responsibility of the individual.

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Though knowing about the restrictions of occupational chances and growing youth unemployment, overcoming the obstacles is seen as depending upon one's own motivation and resources. The repertory to account for success and failure in the education and VET systems is quite similar. Low achievement in school and training is attributed to a loss of motivation and not having studied hard enough.

When course and result of schooling and training are assigned mainly to individual motivation and skill this will have bearing on the individual's labor market behavior in the future, too. If you are responsible for the situation which has occurred, then you hope to improve your employment prospects by trying harder and if you do not succeed you tend to blame yourself.

By applying the pattern of biographical construction the course of the transition process is being shaped retrospectively in form of interim balances. The increasing flexibility of youth in regard to the options available in the labor market is subjectively tied to a biographical interpretation which creates a personal obligation to keep pace with almost any result of the transition sequence as long as it promises a useful qualification for employment. This interpretation becomes most evident when practical interests and aptitudes are mentioned as reasons for the vocational training one has entered: By this precedure skills and interests can be coordinated to a series of different occupations which get within reaching distance in the course of the transition process.

Thereby young people collect subjective reasons for options coming up by linking them to preferences, interests and skills which they have acquired in pre-occupational processes of socialization.

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By "perceiving selection processes as opening up new prospects" school-leavers manage to conceive of each stage reached in the search for an apprenticeship - may it support, delay or even hinder occupational plans - as a new chance for a vocational qualification. Explaining social processes of screening and sorting this way means to anticipate that its results will eventually have positive effects on getting started.

If no apprenticeship has been found, despite substantial re-orientations, young people are ready to grasp temporary options, like postponing vocational training without turning to an attitude of resignation, however.

The patterns of interpretation sketched seem to subjectively support young people to continue with their transition despite the restrictions and demands they are confronted with. In view of threatening unemployment at each stage of the sequence from school to work school-leavers attempt to actively cope with limited opportunities in order not to get cut off from prospects to enter qualified employment.

6. Individual coping as social reproduction

Vocational training and starting a job are crystallisation points, not only for those abilities and skills that are needed and developed in the work process but also for the development and exercise of social and political capabilities through which personal and social interests can be represented. The training crisis is therefore undermining a crucial condition for the emergence of personal, social and political qualities.

The transition from school to work today is fraught with discontinuities and breaks, although its importance for the development of personality, values, self-confidence and social insight is as undisputed as ever.

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During this phase young people may well go through a personal crisis, and for a growing number of them the difficulties on the labor market prevent this from being solved by the concentration needed for vocational training. The young people who go into bridging course in a school or become unemployed find themselves in a very restrictive situation in life: they can only think and plan over the very short term, they have only minimal scope for action and virtually no responsibility; their social relations are mainly of a private and often changing nature and they lack the sense of comradeship and experience of cooperation that can be found at work. If they can only obtain preliminary or part vocational qualifications they have less opportunity to learn and the ambivalence of their position - they are not really at school anymore but they are not earning a living - is quite a considerable psychological strain.

Vocational training acts as a socialisation process, it creates a potential for proper specialized work and for action that is thought through socially and politically, and without it a growing number of the labor force will not be able to cope with the requirements of technological change. Moreover, vocational training must be the basis for creating interest-oriented qualifications and design of work.

However, the crisis in the education system is pushing more and more young people out of qualified vocational training and into jobs they do not want, or redicting them to courses where they can only obtain partial qualifications.

Effective measures to counteract this disastrous trend in training and unemployment for young people are only conceivable as part of a strategy to reduce unemployment altogether Particularly on a regional basis

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we need cooperation between employers, unions and education institutes to work out an overall strategy to counteract youth unemployment. But we largely lack the necessary regional labor market analyses and the documentation on vocational training which could provide a basis for action.

To understand consciousness and actions of school-leavers it is useful to turn to the theory of social reproduction developed by the French sociologist Bourdieu (1981). According to this theory the transition from school to work is accomplished as if structural conditions and individual actions interact in producing step by step results youth are able to cope with.

Searching for an apprenticeship is based on practical knowledge and occupational interests. It is like travelling to a certain destination without a map, but with a sense that there are options available and detours ahead one has to be aware of. The route taken is neither derived from a systematic exploration of the terrain nor from conforming to a set of fixed rules. It is the result of the joint operation of a basic occupational orientation and socialization experiences stemming from observations, explorations and activities in the labor market. Elements of the social class culture still exist in the back of mind of the young though they do not suffice for deducing one single adequate line of action to promote the goal of entering qualified employment.

Due to the stability of the VET system which is supported by a shared normative consensus that only a vocationally trained and certified person will have a chance to succeed in the employment system, the responsibility for accomplishing the transition from school to work is ascribed to the individual.

In contrast to schools and universities, the VET system is directly linked to economic and political conditions which structure the labor market. Thus, vocational training functions as a form of symbolic domination because it depends on the social division of labor and leads to an unequal distribution of income opportunities and at the same time it socializes the young person to accept the criteria of entering and remaining in the employment system.

Today, youth has to face a contradictory situation: on the one hand certificates of vocational training are becoming a prerequisite to get a good job, on the other the connection between vocational certificates and employment loses its validity. As a way out young people intensify their efforts to qualify for work, thereby individualistic perspectives of action are reinforced which in turn contribute to the social reproduction of inequality.

The social conditions which restrict occupational prospects are rarely subject to a critique by most of the school-leavers. The internalized norms of self-responsibility (cf. Heinz 1981) seem to prevent them from protesting against the enforced readjustments of plans and interests. In turning to patterns of personal interpretation social contradictions appear to young people as individual or interpersonal dilemmas to be coped with by following each option which seems to promise a training for employment.

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